

Missile Counter-Attack by Lloyd Axworthy

Posted by

Saturday, 05 March 2005 14:32 - Last Updated Saturday, 05 March 2005 14:32

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Lloyd Axworthy: Dear Condi-- I know it seems improbable to your divinely guided master in the White House that mere mortals might disagree with participating in a missile-defence system that has failed in its last three tests, even though the tests themselves were carefully rigged to show results. But, gosh, we folks above the 49th parallel are somewhat cautious types who can't quite see laying down billions of dollars in a three-dud poker game. As our erstwhile Prairie-born and bred (and therefore prudent) finance minister pointed out in presenting his recent budget, we've had eight years of balanced or surplus financial accounts. If we're going to spend money, Mr. Goodale added, it will be on day-care and health programs, and even on more foreign aid and improved defence.

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Subject: Missile Counter-Attack/Lloyd Axworthy

From: Radical Press <radical@radicalpress.com>

To: Novelty-Lifeboat <novelty-lifeboat@yahoogroups.com>

I thought you would like to see Lloyd Axworthy's letter to Ms. Rice as it appeared in the Winnipeg Free Press

Arthur Topham

Radical Press

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Axworthy fires back at U.S. -- and Canadian -- critics of our BMD decision in An Open Letter to U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice

Thursday, March 3rd, 2005

By LLOYD AXWORTHY

Dear Condi,

I'm glad you've decided to get over your fit of pique and venture north to visit your closest neighbour. It's a chance to learn a thing or two. Maybe more.

I know it seems improbable to your divinely guided master in the White House that mere mortals might disagree with participating in a missile-defence system that has failed in its last three tests, even though the tests themselves were carefully rigged to show results.

But, gosh, we folks above the 49th parallel are somewhat cautious types who can't quite see laying down billions of dollars in a three-dud poker game.

As our erstwhile Prairie-born and bred (and therefore prudent) finance minister pointed out in presenting his recent budget, we've had eight years of balanced or surplus financial accounts. If we're going to spend money, Mr. Goodale added, it will be on day-care and health programs, and even on more foreign aid and improved defence.

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Sure, that doesn't match the gargantuan, multi-billion-dollar deficits that your government blithely runs up fighting a "liberation war" in Iraq, laying out more than half of all weapons expenditures in the world, and giving massive tax breaks to the top one per cent of your population while cutting food programs for poor children.

Just chalk that up to a different sense of priorities about what a national government's role should be when there isn't a prevailing mood of manifest destiny.

Coming to Ottawa might also expose you to a parliamentary system that has a thing called question period every day, where those in the executive are held accountable by an opposition for their actions, and where demands for public debate on important topics such a missile defence can be made openly.

You might also notice that it's a system in which the governing party's caucus members are not afraid to tell their leader that their constituents don't want to follow the ideological, perhaps teleological, fantasies of Canada's continental co-inhabitant. And that this leader actually listens to such representations.

Your boss did not avail himself of a similar opportunity to visit our House of Commons during his visit, fearing, it seems, that there might be some signs of dissent. He preferred to issue his *diktat* on missile defence in front of a highly controlled, pre-selected audience.

Such control-freak antics may work in the virtual one-party state that now prevails in Washington. But in Canada we have a residual belief that politicians should be subject to a few checks and balances, an idea that your country once espoused before the days of empire.

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If you want to have us consider your proposals and positions, present them in a proper way, through serious discussion across the table in our cabinet room, as your previous president did when he visited Ottawa. And don't embarrass our prime minister by lobbing a verbal missile at him while he sits on a public stage, with no chance to respond.

Now, I understand that there may have been some miscalculations in Washington based on faulty advice from your resident governor of the "northern territories," Ambassador Cellucci. But you should know by now that he hasn't really won the hearts and minds of most Canadians through his attempts to browbeat and command our allegiance to U.S. policies.

Sadly, Mr. Cellucci has been far too closeted with exclusive groups of 'experts' from Calgary think-tanks and neo-con lobbyists at cross-border conferences to remotely grasp a cross-section of Canadian attitudes (nor American ones, for that matter).

I invite you to expand the narrow perspective that seems to inform your opinions of Canada by ranging far wider in your reach of contacts and discussions. You would find that what is rising in Canada is not so much anti-Americanism, as claimed by your and our right-wing commentators, but fundamental disagreements with certain policies of your government. You would see that rather than just reacting to events by drawing on old conventional wisdoms, many Canadians are trying to think our way through to some ideas that can be helpful in building a more secure world.

These Canadians believe that security can be achieved through well-modulated efforts to protect the rights of people, not just nation-states.

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To encourage and advance international co-operation on managing the risk of climate change, they believe that we need agreements like Kyoto.

To protect people against international crimes like genocide and ethnic cleansing, they support new institutions like the International Criminal Court -- which, by the way, you might strongly consider using to hold accountable those committing atrocities today in Darfur, Sudan.

And these Canadians believe that the United Nations should indeed be reformed -- beginning with an agreement to get rid of the veto held by the major powers over humanitarian interventions to stop violence and predatory practices.

On this score, you might want to explore the concept of the 'Responsibility to Protect' while you're in Ottawa. It's a Canadian idea born out of the recent experience of Kosovo and informed by the many horrific examples of inhumanity over the last half-century. Many Canadians feel it has a lot more relevance to providing real human security in the world than missile defence ever will.

This is not just some quirky notion concocted in our long winter nights, by the way. It seems to have appeal for many in your own country, if not the editorialists at the *Wall Street Journal* or Rush Limbaugh. As I discovered recently while giving a series of lectures in southern California, there is keen interest in how the U.S. can offer real leadership in managing global challenges of disease, natural calamities and conflict, other than by military means.

There is also a very strong awareness on both sides of the border of how vital Canada is to the U.S. as a partner in North America. We supply copious amounts of oil and natural gas to your country, our respective trade is the world's largest in volume, and we are increasingly bound together by common concerns over

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depletion of resources, especially very scarce fresh water.

Why not discuss these issues with Canadians who understand them, and seek out ways to better cooperate in areas where we agree -- and agree to respect each other's views when we disagree.

Above all, ignore the Cassandras who deride the state of our relations because of one missile-defence decision. Accept that, as a friend on your border, we will offer a different, independent point of view. And that there are times when truth must speak to power.

In friendship,

Lloyd Axworthy

Lloyd Axworthy is president of the

University of Winnipeg and a former Canadian foreign minister.